

Direct Communication Project

Paper No. 6

Contingency Planning for Single Parents and Tandem Couples with Children

Tandem couples with children and single parent employees have special needs to consider before going to an overseas posting. During some crisis situations, it may be necessary to order the departure of family members and non-critical personnel. If single parents or tandem couples hold critical positions, they will be required to stay at post and their children will have to leave. Prior planning is necessary to arrange for the care of these children during the evacuation and at their safehaven location.

Once employees arrive at post, they should review the emergency action plan and discuss with their supervisors whether their position is likely to be declared critical and what options exist. Employees need to prioritize family issues and consider their children's needs and ages. It is also important to remember that, during any tour, there are likely to be crisis periods which require the employee to work long hours every day. Planning for such periods by arranging for the child to stay with friends reassures the child and allows the employee to concentrate on his/her job.

In the case of an evacuation, the critical employee should consider accompanying the child to the safehaven to help him/her get settled. If this is not possible, the employee should arrange for another adult family member to accompany the child to the safehaven.

Prior arrangements must be made with a relative or friend to care for the child at the

safehaven. The person selected should be someone with whom the child already has a warm, personal relationship - someone who will understand the child's need for support and love during this stressful time.

The safehaven location chosen for the child needs advance consideration in order to avoid undue personal cost. If the United States is officially designated as the safehaven, travel will be paid to any point in the continental United States. All subsequent travel, however, will be at the employee's expense, until the child is authorized to return to post or the employee returns to Washington.

Parents also need to consider the financial aspects involved when another individual cares for their child. A detailed financial arrangement should be worked out ahead of time to cover the child's expenses. One idea is to maintain a joint checking account with the individual who will care for the child. In an emergency, this account can be activated with a transfer of funds or an emergency deposit. The employee should give the child's caregiver a Power of Attorney to cover medical and other special needs, such as signing report cards and other school forms. During a crisis, the employee cannot always expect that telephone calls to the safehaven will be possible or that mail will move in the normal manner from post to the United States.

Employees should bring some transitional clothing to post so that, in case of an evacuation order, the child will have suitable clothing for any climate. The child's passport

should always be valid with appropriate entry and exit visas for the country of assignment and any neighboring countries that are suggested by the post. For entry into school, the child will need to have evidence of a physical exam within the past 12 months and a TB test within the month. (This test can sometimes be done at post prior to departure.) The child's school and shot records should always be up to date as these records are critical for entry into most U.S. school systems. The child or accompanying adult should HANDCARRY the records on the evacuation aircraft in case the luggage does not arrive at the safehaven destination.

The child evacuee will be given the normal airfreight allowance. The parent might make an advance list of the items needed by the child and caregiver in the safehaven. The accompanying luggage should always include items that will be important to the child's physical and emotional well being: special toys or blankets, photos of the family and a beloved pet, medicine, a diary, or a cassette player with favorite tapes and earphones.

Through contingency planning, the parent can provide a supportive and understanding environment for the child evacuee that will lay the foundation for the child and parent to work through the crisis and move together toward a period of positive growth.